



SALAD DAYS

Radicchio and greens perfect with pasta. / Page B4

TOWNS BLOOM

Communities around N.S. are flowering. / Page B3



Jane Veldhoven, professional organizer, assesses a master bedroom closet in Halifax. Although it's spacious, this closet is cluttered with items that shouldn't be stored in the bedroom, including luggage and a filing cabinet. (TIM KROCHAK / Staff)



One of Jane Veldhoven's goals as she whipped this linen closet into shape was to weed out items that didn't fit with the linen-closet theme. (INGRID BULMER / Staff)

Closet secrets

The house may be tidy — but what lurks behind storage doors could blow your cover

By KELLY SHIERS
Features Writer

PICTURE YOURSELF throwing open your closet doors — every closet door in your home — to show a guest.

Will the reaction be admiring oohs and aahs over how well it's organized?

Or is it more likely that you'll have to take cover amid the avalanche of contents that will spill out?

Are sheets and towels so crammed into your linen closet that you couldn't possibly fit one more? Has your closet floor disappeared under piles of clothes, suitcases and other assorted stuff? Is there enough space to try to hang a guest's jacket in the hallway closet?

If you've reached the point where you don't want to open a door, either out of embarrassment or frustration, chances are you suffer from a common malady — closet overload.

"Our biggest thing is, we don't designate certain closets for certain types of items," says professional organizer Jane Veldhoven, recalling one of the many closets she's brought back to useful life.

"When I first walked into this master bedroom closet, there were definitely clothes hanging; however, there also were suitcases, a filing cabinet, things all over the floor, even sweaters on a bookshelf that was there, too. It was a clothing closet gone haywire."

And that wasn't even close to the worst closet she's seen.

She's actually opened doors only to have everything fall out around her, although she says "usually you have to touch something" to set off the onslaught.

And in front hallway closets she often finds dog food, golf bags and tennis rackets, decorations for Halloween, Christmas and Easter, and books filling the shelves.

No matter how badly cluttered things seem, don't give up hope. There's not a closet that can't be made better if you take your time to do the job properly, says Veldhoven.

"The biggest thing is, do one closet at a time," she says, warning people that organizing always means first making a mess. "Say we designate this closet for linen — all the things that don't belong there are going to have to make a big mess somewhere else for a time."

While professional organizers can pave the way to efficient and tidy storage space, you can get helpful tips from magazines, home improvement shows and websites.

"Organizing closets has become a huge trend," says Veldhoven. "Now it's a lot less of, 'I hope no one opens my closet.' It's a lot more of, 'I want to show off my home' because the trend is to make our homes beautiful places, and closets have become an extension of that."

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HOW TO TIDY UP CLOSET - AND KEEP IT THAT WAY

Tips for getting your closets organized and keeping them that way:

- Take a tour of your closets. Note not only how many you have but where they are and their sizes.

- Designate certain closets for certain items. Combination closets do work, in a limited fashion. For example, a guest room or home office closet can — with the right approach — also provide space for extra shoes and out-of-season or seldom-worn clothes.

- Organize one closet at a time. Be prepared for the mess as you put all the things that shouldn't be in that closet someplace else. Remember, it always looks worse before it gets better.

- Take your time as you sort, purge and organize. Be ruthless about getting rid of things you seldom or no longer use.

- Choose wooden or heavy-duty white plastic hangers to hang clothes properly. They take up more space than wire hangers, so allow for the extra room.

- Shop for storage ideas only after you've gotten rid of the excess. Buying containers, shelves, stacking units and

hanging rods in advance will only add to your clutter, as you'll likely discover after you've gotten rid of a lot of things that what's left can be stored better some other way.

- Use every bit of space available in the closet. A typical closet has one hanging rod at about 1.5 metres. It may be more useful to install slightly lower and slightly higher hanging rods instead.

- When it comes to storage ideas, there's something to fit all budgets. Baskets, shelves and extra hanging rods are available at reasonable prices and can be installed by the do-it-yourselfer or, if cost is no concern, you may hire a carpenter and opt for totally custom-made storage.

- Manufacturers have also provided other options. For example, ClosetMaid makes a popular white wire closet system and prefabricated melamine systems. (Check out the website at www.closetmaid.com to see examples and find retailers in your area.)

- If you choose a wire closet system, make sure its parts are adjustable. Find

out if you can install it yourself or if you'll need help.

- Prefabricated melamine systems (fans of home improvement shows and magazines may have seen similar designs in the U.S. by California Closets) come in a wide range of furniture-like finishes. These are more expensive than wire systems but can be especially nice in a walk-in closet and may allow you to get rid of your dressers.

- Use baskets rather than plastic containers to keep things tidy in clothes closets for a more decorative look. Plastic is fine in utility closets to store household supplies.

- Shop with storage in mind. Sure you save money by buying toilet paper in bulk, but if you haven't the space to store 24 rolls, you'll save yourself aggravation and a mess by keeping only an extra package of four on hand.

- For expert help, check out www.organizersincanada.com for a list of professional organizers near you.

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Gotta be tough to get organized

By KELLY SHIERS
Features Writer

It's no good to get sentimental when you're organizing your clothes closet.

Sure, you had a good time when you wore that dress, and someday, maybe, those ties will come back in style. But if you're not using these things now,

they've got to go. When professional organizer Jane Veldhoven starts working on a clothes closet, she takes out every item, holds it up and asks her clients four questions:

1. When was the last time you wore it?
2. Does it fit?
3. Do you love it?

4. When you wear it, does it make you feel good?

If she hears a No to any of the last three, "it has to go."

The only question left to ask at that point: Is it good enough to give to charity?

If not, it goes in the garbage.

Once that major purge is over, take a look at what you want to keep, says Veldhoven.

Divide those clothes into categories: casual and work. Then divide again, into sections for sweaters and shirts; pants and skirts; suits; formal attire; shoes and boots; ties and purses.

You'll have piles on the bed and floor by the time you're done.

Veldhoven says clothes closets usually are designed with one hanging rod at about 1.5 metres (five feet) high.

But don't limit yourself to this. Instead, try at least two adjustable hanging rods — one slightly higher than that height and the other slightly lower, say at about a metre (three feet). Another one, hanging even higher, can handle your formal wear or long coats. If there's room, use shoe shelves that reach from floor to ceiling.